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Idaho, Federal Fish Agencies Reach Agreement on Cooperative Conservation

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries Service) said today that it had reached an important agreement with the state of Idaho and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that spells out how the state and the two federal agencies will cooperate under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) for the long-term benefit of both fish and foresters in the state.

"This is an important step on the road to an approved, voluntary program for foresters in Idaho's Snake drainage to help conserve fish and their habitat while providing foresters with a level of certainty under the ESA," said Bob Lohn, head of the NOAA Fisheries Service Northwest Region.

A forestry agreement is envisioned as part of the settlement of the Snake River Basin Adjudication. The agreement announced today is a critical piece of that forestry agreement, the agency said.

NOAA Fisheries Service said the parties continue to work on the forest practices program – the measures that would be implemented on the ground – that landowners may voluntarily elect to follow in return for certainty that their activities comply with the ESA. The agreement is intended to be for 30 years.

The forestry negotiations encompass the Clearwater and Salmon river basins in central Idaho, and could include as many as 1.5 million acres of state and private forestland.

The discussions address five fish populations protected under the Endangered Species Act: sockeye, spring/summer Chinook, fall Chinook, and steelhead in the Snake River, and Columbia Basin bull trout.

The Clearwater River basin, particularly the lower basin, includes both important listed fish populations and large amounts of state and industrial timberland. These state and private timberlands contribute significantly to Idaho's overall timber harvest. According to NOAA Fisheries Service, habitat conservation on state and private lands will complement federal land-management programs in portions of these basins, and provide coordinated conservation across entire watersheds.

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